



## COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

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### **Virginia Programs Recognized as Two of “52 Most Innovative AmeriCorps State Programs in the U.S.”**

**Richmond** – Two Virginia volunteer programs have been recognized as among the most innovative in the country. In the newest edition of [\*“Transforming Communities through Service: A Collection of 52 of the Most Innovative AmeriCorps Programs in the United States,”\*](#) Virginia Commonwealth University’s (VCU) AmeriCorps [America Reads](#) and [Alternatives, Inc.](#) of Peninsula AmeriCorps Serve and Support (PASS) are featured.

[Innovations in Civic Participation](#) (ICP) and [America's Service Commissions](#) (ASC) collaborated on the publication to highlight innovative AmeriCorps\*State programs. ICP and ASC received nominations from state service commissions throughout the United States and chose 52 programs from 39 states to be featured.

“Both of these programs are excellent examples of how collaboration and innovation are improving the lives of our children and strengthening Virginia’s social safety net,” said Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) Commissioner Martin Brown. “We’re honored that these best practice programs have been selected and will be shared throughout the United States.” VDSS’ Office on Volunteerism and Community Service (OVCS) manages Virginia AmeriCorps efforts.

Established in 1995, the VCU AmeriCorps program aims to improve the literacy skills of children and families in Metro Richmond. The university-based effort supports literacy and educational achievement at the elementary school level through “America Reads in the City of Richmond and Henrico County” (ARCH). The goal is to ensure that every student is proficient in reading by the end of the third grade.

VCU’s 57 AmeriCorps members provide one-on-one and small-group tutoring and mentoring services for nearly 1,000 children at 17 elementary schools and three Boys and Girls Clubs. Members also encourage students to attend college and volunteer in their communities. Studies indicate that throughout the last 15 years, 75 percent of the students targeted to receive tutoring assistance from VCU AmeriCorps Members have improved academically.

Alternatives, Inc./PASS enhances life skills, health and wellness, workplace readiness skills, career preparation and civic engagement for youth ages 13-18 in the Virginia Peninsula. PASS AmeriCorps members provide instruction in visual art, music, videography, dance and theater.

PASS' 48 AmeriCorps members – all students at Christopher Newport University – serve the Hampton Teen Center. In its first year of operation, the program already is successful, serving more than 500 teens in the City of Hampton and recruiting more than 270 volunteers. Developing the civic engagements skills of Hampton-area teens requires a sense of unity between the city's youth and adult leadership. The partnerships established between Alternatives and organizations such as the Hampton Health Department, Virginia Foodbank, and Hampton City Schools actively prepare teens to become leaders and problem solvers in their communities.

“We have always known some of the best AmeriCorps programs are right here in Virginia. The VCU and PASS programs have earned this recognition and will hopefully serve as inspiration to others,” said Nikki Nicholau, OVCS director.

The 2010 publication was unveiled on June 27 in New York. It is available online at [www.icicp.org](http://www.icicp.org) and [www.statecommissions.org](http://www.statecommissions.org). For more information on AmeriCorps programs and their impact on the Commonwealth, visit [www.vaservice.org](http://www.vaservice.org).

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